

2.7.2.6 Being predictable - more revealing

Key points: - If you surprise someone, they are more likely to hit you.
- Don't just signal - be predictable!

This is a hugely important idea, and starts with a basic question. Who do you think should make sure that other people anticipate what you do?

If you believe it is nearly all their own responsibility, you are missing a big opportunity, and putting yourself in needless danger.

Whenever your actions are unexpected by someone else, it is as dangerous for you as it is for them. Put simply:

if you surprise someone, they are more likely to hit you.

This applies to all road users - even pedestrians. The problem will be that they expected you to do something else, or did not even know you were there.

Let's look further. Why do you signal?
This is another vital question.

The Highway Code says:

"to warn and inform other road users of your intended actions".

And this comes with guidance rules for when and how to signal in various circumstances - at junctions or roundabouts, changing lane, and so on.



But is it enough to just give out a signal to "warn and inform"? It can become a quite robotic action, that passes your fate into the hands of someone else.

In many situations, even your signal according to the rules will still leave some of the people around you surprised. Perhaps they could not see the signal, are not very alert, or for some reason just assumed you would do something else. Maybe they were even relying on you to do something else!

However, your safety will be dramatically increased by adopting a much bigger objective than to "warn and inform". It is to simply:

Be predictable!!

These are two tremendously powerful words, once you have grasped their full meaning. They are the reason why so much of what you do is necessary. You just need to be predictable to those around you.

With this objective in your driving, it will inevitably lead to:

- a better understanding of your total situation
- a style that is more involved in what is happening around you
- better searching for the road users who could hit you
- cooperating more to help others anticipate you - and checking that they have
- making all your "signals" consistent (indicators, position, direction, speed, brake lights, horn, where you point your front wheels, where you are looking, etc).

The purpose of being predictable is:

to actively help everyone to adjust safely to what you do.

It highlights again the importance of a positive and purposeful driving style, that leaves no doubt about what is happening. A passive or nervous driver will send mixed signals, and create uncertainty.

Some other important points:

- Because surprise is so dangerous, it is guaranteed to anger other road users probably more than anything else. No matter what errors you make, the element of surprise is instinctively a greater threat. In fact, causing a surprise will often be the error itself.
- You can do unexpected things that otherwise seem to be your "right" to do. For example, going all the way round a small roundabout when you are lost is likely to be a surprise for other traffic.

Or there are things that you fail to do, such as the notorious case of not entering a roundabout when the chap behind thought you would.

Not that you have to resolve this by lunging forward in advance of your judgement. You can simply keep your brake lights on until you decide to actually go.

In other words:

don't let someone think you are going to do something you are not.

- You can also react to an incoming surprise in a way that magnifies it for someone else, such as happens in braking waves along tight-flowing traffic. You should aim to "absorb and reduce" surprises, not increase them.

Fortunately, there are two advantages in the surprises you give out over those that you receive:

- they are under your own control to prevent
- you can change your own driving very quickly.

By contrast, being less surprised by others needs sharp anticipation, which may take a while to gain.

So, although it has such a huge benefit in safety:

being predictable is relatively easy to achieve.

